

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A universal optical disc player, comprising:

a disc drive with associated drive controller;

a processor coupled to said drive controller;

signal processing circuitry coupled to said processor and having an output port for coupling to a media presentation device;

a memory coupled to said processor having a data structure defined therein;

said data structure comprising an operating system having an associated virtual machine that provides an environment to host an auto-run playback program obtained from an optical disc placed in said disc drive;

said operating system and said auto-run playback program collectively provide control instructions to said processor to cause said processor to access media content from said optical disc and supply said media content to said signal processing circuitry for output to said media presentation device.

2. The disc player of claim 1 wherein said media content includes embedded information used by said auto-run playback program.

3. The disc player of claim 1 wherein said media content includes embedded active agent program and said auto-run playback program interacts with said active agent program.

4. The disc player of claim 1 wherein said data structure further comprises media support data used by said virtual machine in the event an auto-run program is not obtained from said optical disc.

5. The disc player of claim 1 wherein said media content includes embedded active agent program and said auto-run playback program interacts with said active agent program to effect copy protection.

6. A method of distributing media content, comprising:

placing an auto-run playback program on a machine-readable vehicle that also embodies said media content;

supplying said machine-readable vehicle to a playback system;

loading said auto-run playback program into said playback system in response to said supplying step; and

using said loaded auto-run playback program to access and supply said media content through a media presentation device coupled to said playback system.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said machine-readable vehicle is an optical disc.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein said machine-readable vehicle is a memory device.

9. The method of claim 6 wherein said machine-readable vehicle is a carrier wave propagated over a communications network.

10. The method of claim 6 further comprising embedding an active agent program in said machine-readable vehicle and causing said auto-run playback program and said active agent program to interact in said process of accessing and supplying said media content through said media presentation device.

11. The method of claim 6 further comprising embedding an active agent program in said machine-readable vehicle and using said active agent program to interact with said auto-run playback program to implement copy protection.

12. The method of claim 6 wherein said step of using said loaded auto-run playback program comprises providing a virtual machine within an operating system of a media player and executing said auto-run playback program from within said virtual machine.

13. The method of claim 6 wherein said playback system is a disc player and said supplying step is performed by placing a disc containing said auto-run playback program in said disc player.

14. The method of claim 6 further comprising supplying legacy media playback program and using said legacy media playback program in the event said auto-run playback program is not present on said media.